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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

Letter dated 16 November 1991 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit, enclosed herewith, the information from the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia concerning the status of and the problems related to refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 96.

(Signed) Dragomir DJOKIĆ
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex

THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES AND THE RELATED PROBLEMS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

For a few months now, escaping the horrors of war, columns of refugees have been seeking and finding refuge in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and among its population.

According to the latest information, there are over 600,000 refugees in the two Yugoslav republics (Serbia and Montenegro). The official statistics indicate that out of that number there are 540,000 refugees in Serbia: 199,000 from Croatia, approximately 304,000 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and about 37,000 from Slovenia. The majority are Serbs (84 per cent); over 6 per cent are Muslims, 1.5 per cent Croats and the remainder Albanians, Jews, gypsies, Bulgarians and Hungarians, etc.

There are 62,500 registered refugees in Montenegro. Out of that number, 55,800 are refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 6.7 per cent from Croatia and Slovenia. According to reliable sources, the total number of refugees in Montenegro is 10,000 higher. Consequently, the total number of refugees constitute 12 per cent of the republic's overall population. Serbs, Montenegrins and Muslims are equally represented in the refugee population.

Children and youths of up to 18 years of age constitute 58 per cent of the refugee population in Montenegro and 42.6 per cent in Serbia. In both republics, the majority - over 80 per cent of the refugees - are women. This structure clearly indicates that we are dealing with the most vulnerable segment of the population which, owing to long exposure to fear, stress, breakup of family ties and loss of relatives, needs improved health care and social protection.

The refugees usually come to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia without any means of subsistence and cannot collect the pensions, disability payments or other social security benefits they were entitled to in the regions they came from. Their prospects of returning to their homes and the property they left behind are rather uncertain.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its population have taken on a heavy burden in fulfilling their human duty towards the refugees. Ever since the refugee problems first arose, the federal authorities, along with the bodies of the republics and the communities, companies, Red Cross organizations and other humanitarian organizations have become actively engaged in providing accommodation to refugees with the support of all Yugoslav citizens in the country and abroad and of various religious and other organizations.

In both Yugoslav republics, special bodies - commissariats - have been set up to provide assistance to the refugees.

All refugees in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are entitled to the same comprehensive health-care services as the local population. Pupils and students are enrolled in schools and universities under the same terms and conditions as the children and youths of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Traditional family and human solidarity have made it possible for 90 per cent of the refugees in both republics to be accommodated in the homes of relatives, friends or simply people of goodwill who wanted to help others in need. The State has accepted this practice. However, time has shown that it has a positive and a negative side. On the one hand, such a form of accommodation is advantageous since it prevents "ghettoization" of refugees. On the other, it prevents the problems from being seen in their entirety and consequently hinders their systematic and ultimate solution. Furthermore, the host families are confronted with obligations with which they are increasingly unable to cope without adequate assistance from the public sector or charity. Outside help is shrinking and insufficient to make up even for a fraction of what the host families have been willing to offer to the refugees from the very first day. Their readiness to help has been drastically eroded by the steady worsening of their social and economic situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which has been further exacerbated by the Security Council sanctions. In such circumstances, practically the whole population of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia may find itself in need of humanitarian assistance, with shortages of heating fuel for the coming winter and of the basic staples, not to mention acute problems in the field of health care.

More and more citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, even though they work, cannot provide even the minimum for the livelihood of their families. The average income has fallen below 100 deutsche mark. Unemployment figures have soared to 15 per cent and a great number of workers are on forced leave owing to the decline in economic activity as a consequence of the Security Council sanctions, with uncertain perspectives of holding on to their jobs. The drastic decline in the real sources of public income adversely affects payments of pensions, disability and child support payments, unemployment benefits, welfare and subsidies to social welfare institutions, which have more and more beneficiaries from the ranks of the local and refugee population. Major problems in the functioning of health-care services with increased needs may have far-reaching consequences for the health of a population already affected by poor nutrition, physical weakness, anxiety and stress.

In addition to already extremely unfavourable development trends, drastically accentuated by the harsh Security Council sanctions, Yugoslavia has been struck by elemental catastrophes - drought and floods of major proportions.

Under such circumstances, the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its population are making desperate efforts to fulfil their human obligation - to help the refugees who have come to their territory. The following are the most acute problems needing solution before the winter sets in:

(a) Provision of enough food and products for personal hygiene for all refugees, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as babies, infants, pregnant women and nursing mothers;

(b) A growing need to move the refugees from families to more adequate collective facilities (by adapting those in existence and building new ones) and to prefabricated buildings, and to accommodate orphaned children, the elderly and the disabled in appropriate welfare institutions;

(c) Accommodation of children in preschool institutions and school-age children in pupils' and students' homes, and the provision of school supplies, etc.;

(d) Shortages of medicines and medical equipment, increasingly acute in view of the growing needs of the population of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and of the refugees.

As you know, a United Nations inter-agency mission visited all the former republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in August 1992 and was able to see all the problems related to the accommodation of refugees and the assistance needed to that effect. The mission concluded that the cost of the humanitarian assistance needed to address these problems in the period from September 1992 to March 1993 would amount to US$ 300 million for the refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia only.

However, in the appeal prepared on the basis of the mission's findings, the United Nations agencies envisaged less than half of resources required to meet the total needs of refugees in the whole of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, i.e. less than US$ 100 million in the case of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

In reducing the amount of the assessed requirements requested in the appeal, resources for the accommodation of refugees were particularly cut back. In addition, the needs of the host families were not fully taken into account, nor were the requirements in oil for humanitarian purposes, which will be one of the major problems of the population of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the refugees it has accepted. Even if the assistance envisaged in the appeal materializes at the proposed or a lower level, it will still be insufficient to meet the needs of the refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and many problems with ominous and far-reaching consequences will remain unsolved, all the more so if the international community, i.e. every individual country, does not become more responsive and channel more resources at the bilateral level to the refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The time at which Yugoslavia has been compelled to appeal for more adequate and timely international humanitarian relief is fraught with the so far unprecedented interaction of two factors: the heavy burden of care and responsibility for over half a million refugees and the Security Council sanctions. Taken together, these factors not only will have drastic consequences for Yugoslavia's long-term economic development, but they also

threaten the Yugoslav population and the refugees it has accepted with severe social consequences. Without adequate understanding and help from the international community to eliminate the causes of such bleak perspectives, unforeseeable consequences threaten to jeopardize present and future generations, consequences that even our closest neighbours will not be able to avoid.